

Positive leadership Interview with Marcos de Quinto

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“The world belongs to the unhappy and, indeed, when you’re not satisfied with something is when you try to improve it”

Marcos de Quinto, current chairman of Coca-Cola Spain

Marcos de Quinto, current chairman of Coca-Cola Spain, holds a degree in Economics from Universidad Complutense de Madrid and an MBA from Instituto de Empresa. He joined the company in 1982 and he has since held positions as District Manager, Distribution Manager and Distribution and Merchandising Manager at the company. He left Coca-Cola between 1988 and 1990 to become manager of the ALAS BATES / BSB Advertising agencies and returned in 1990 as Director of Marketing before taking on the position of Division Marketing Manager for Coca-Cola Southeast & West Asia between 1992 and 1995. He was also manager of the German division (1995-96). Iberia was appointed head of the Coca-Cola Company’s Iberia Business Unit in January 2000 and at present, in addition to his position as CEO of the Company in Spain, he is Deputy Chairman of the American Business Council and he is on the Boards of Directors of GSI Spain and GREFUSA (Snack Co.).



Mr de Quinto, recently Coca-Cola has once again featured as leader in the rankings of the most desirable companies for professionals to work for. What are the main guidelines you use in managing the company in order to reinforce the image of Coca-Cola as an active and innovative company capable of attracting talent?

A company is not attractive because of its profits. Nor because it has a gym and saunas, or because it offers flexible work hours. I think what really matters to executives when they decide to work at a company is that they are allowed to have ideas. It is basic. Once they are allowed to have ideas they also need to be allowed to discuss them. Listening to your people is the key to making them feel good at the company and making them feel valued.

However, what sets Coca-Cola apart and makes it attractive as a company is the chance we give for these ideas to see the light. That is what really motivates a

professional and makes them committed to a company. Regardless of the amount of knowledge stored in your human resources department, without the motivation that comes from seeing your projects developed, it is impossible to create a bond with the company. From my point of view, the really important thing is to provide an outlet for the ideas of our human capital.

What image do you most like to associate with this creative capacity of your company?

I like to think of this company as a pirate ship, in the sense that I hate the excesses of discipline and of having everything pre-planned. I want people to be diverse and able to improvise. When we are boarding another ship or when we are at battle stations it is necessary to believe in people's initiative and that they know what they must do. In large-scale battles, having a huge Prussian army that only moves if you say "to the right", "to the left", "forward, march" or "backward, march" is the fastest way to lose the war. Today's market is so agile that it is essential to be quick and able to adapt to the unexpected. We enjoy it. I personally believe in the need to provide teams with broad guidelines as to what they should do, but I have complete faith in my people's ability to act correctly without needing to be given instructions constantly.

Nowadays this talent is difficult to find and retain due to the high unemployment rate in our country. What characteristics does Coca-Cola look for in its professionals and leaders of the future?

Coca-Cola is a very diverse company, and in fact I can only speak from the experience of the Ibérica division and how we manage that situation. If we broadened the focus at global level the response would be too vague. Let's say that in Spain we look for good professionals and it is essential that they are also good people.

“When we are in the middle of the battle, is necessary to believe in ours people’s initiative and their capacity to do what must be done”

I believe that to belong to this crew you need to be “good” from a human perspective. Professionals who can be trusted by their colleagues and with whom it is really possible to form an agile and efficient team. In addition, they must have a lot of knowledge and also the ability to forget that knowledge when necessary. When someone thinks they have knowledge and the world evolves beyond that knowledge they remain entrenched in it and, as a result, they end up lagging behind. We look for people who know how to cast off each of those certainties in time. Certainties are great but they are usually short-lived.

Robert Woodruff, one of the pioneers of Coca-Cola, said that the world belongs to the discontented and, indeed, it is when you are dissatisfied with something that you try to improve it. When you are dissatisfied with a process you change the process to make it more efficient. For example, when you are dissatisfied with a universal marketing law and you realise that it does not work, you immediately try to review it. At Coca-Cola Spain we are constructively discontented and always willing to change things. That is what makes us evolve.

In various interviews, you mentioned that emotional marketing is essential for overcoming moments of pessimism and crisis. How has leadership evolved in that field?

In the world of marketing, the first priority is to keep your ears to the ground and your eyes open, to look carefully and listen a lot. Then, you must not have too many paradigms because nowadays marketing tries to repeat itself and the people, products and services that stand out are those that stray from the norm. Resorting to supposedly winning formulas is not the solution since marketing is one of those sciences that have evolved relatively little. I am appalled when I see that structures such as Brand Management, which was invented in the 1940s in the US, still survive and are used today.

How would you say the connection between consumers and leading companies has changed in an environment characterised by new technologies? Is there still scope to continue innovating? What about the world of mobile marketing and social networks? ¿Or has everything already been invented?

At Coca-Cola we are experimenting. Anyone who tries to say what must be done, who looks for paradigms for such a new and changing reality as the Internet, is simply making it up. We know that tomorrow school children will be studying what we are implementing at Coca-Cola in text books, as an example of what should be done or what should not be done, but we will be there, in the text books, because we are continuing to experiment.

I believe that we are on the cusp of a new era. It is unthinkable to imagine how things will evolve in the future. But it is obvious that we are leaving behind the historical period marked by the industrial revolution to enter a new and equally important one. I am sure that

the current revolution will absolutely dwarf the industrial revolution. Everything will change. And especially the way in which we relate to each other, at both a personal and an institutional level. Until only recently people were born, interacted with others, got married and lived basically in the town where they were born... and that was their world.

Today the world has opened up in an unthinkable way. It is evident that the repercussions that we will experience will affect us and change us. Society itself is changing. In this regard, the companies that work with a society different to the one that inspired the manuals used in universities are lost. The book of the future is the one that we, the companies that are at the forefront, are writing today.

There are many creative young people who opt for marketing and communications as a career in an environment where it is difficult to make a breakthrough. What message would you give these future professionals to encourage them to continue their efforts and become the leaders of tomorrow?

The first thing I would say to them would be not to listen to much advice from people my age. Secondly, they should not wait for somebody else to save them, rather they should save themselves. Young people must be astute and know how to recognise the great future that there is for people who study, prepare themselves and quickly leave certainties behind. Whenever somebody tells them that things are a certain way or another they must think "And what if things were different? How would I do it?" That is the only way to be successful.

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